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SUBJECT: COMOROS: EXILE OR EXTRADITION FOR BACAR?

REF: ANTANANARIVO 242

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) MFA Comoros desk officer Jacques Biau on March 27 said that renegade Anjouan leader Colonel Bacar had requested political asylum in France. Comoros has also requested Bacar's extradition to stand trial. Biau said that Bacar fled Anjouan when it became apparent that Union of the Comoros forces, backed by African Union troops, would end his control over Anjouan. He then arrived in French-controlled Mayotte. Biau stressed that France had had no knowledge that Bacar was going to flee to Mayotte before he showed up. Bacar had neither said anything in advance to the French nor asked permission to go there. Biau explained that a large number of Anjouanais live in Mayotte and that Bacar was able to find support among them when he arrived.

¶2. (C) Once safely in Mayotte, Bacar made a formal request to France for political asylum/exile. At roughly the same time, the Union of the Comoros government formally requested that Bacar be extradited from Mayotte for prosecution in the Comoros. Biau said that both matters were under review by the GOF. He said that both requests would be studied on their own merits. He refrained from predicting the outcome but promised a fuller discussion at a later point.

¶3. (C) In a March 28 follow-up conversation, Beatrice Lederle (Biau's back-up for the Comoros) confirmed press reports that Bacar had been transferred from Mayotte to Reunion the evening of March 27. She said that the transfer took place solely for security reasons -- that his presence in Mayotte posed too great a risk that his supporters (or opponents) could take to the streets and cause civil unrest. There had already been a few demonstrations. Lederle said that transferring Bacar to Reunion should not be interpreted as an indication that France was inclined to grant him exile. She said that his request for asylum, along with the request by the Union of the Comoros that he be extradited, would be considered on an expedited basis. She said that a ruling was likely "within days and not weeks or months," although she refrained from predicting a specific date when a ruling would be made. Lederle added, consistent with press reports, that Bacar could face French charges for his illegal entry into Mayotte and other possible offenses.

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